

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Charles River Esplanade - New Basin Complex Resource Management Plan (RMP) Public Meeting September 18, 2014**

#### **DCR Staff Present**

Andy Backman, Director, Office of Regional Planning; Rick Corsi, Charles River Planner; Karl Haglund, Charles River New Basin Project Manager, Jim Baecker, Project Manager for the Charles River Esplanade-New Basin RMP; Stephen Brown, Project Manager; Anne Fiesinger, Office of External Affairs and Partnerships; Tom Reece, Director of Partnerships; Mary McCarthy, Deputy Director of Governmental Affairs; Stephen Cyr, Boston Rivers District Manager; and Angelo Tilas, Esplanade-New Basin Field Team Leader.

#### **Public Attendees**

State Representative Jay Livingstone; Ken McClure, Halvorson Design Partnership; Jane Forrestall, West End; Kathleen Philp, MassDOT; Susan Smith; Jessica Mink; Marie Cantlon, West End Civic Association; Elizabeth Cianciola, Charles River Watershed Association; Brendan Kearney, Walk Boston; Dave Uhrenholdt; John Shields, Esplanade 2020 Working Group; Margo Newman, The Esplanade Association; Renata Von Tscharnier, Charles River Conservancy; Jeryl Oristaglio; Kate Sosin, Boston Courant; Kelly Brown, MIT; Ethan Fleming; and Marilyn Wellons, Cambridge.

**Note: The following summary does not serve as a verbatim transcript of the September 18 public meeting. This summary highlights comments received and issues that were raised and replies provided during the Question-and-Answer segment of the meeting. Questions were answered by Andy Backman, Rick Corsi, Karl Haglund and Jim Baecker.**

Question: Is there a timeline for implementation of each project included in the RMP?

DCR: No, a timeline to implement each project cannot be established until the project is funded and permitted.

Question: Will there be an opportunity to discuss public comments on the RMP at another public meeting?

DCR: The final draft RMP presented to the Stewardship Council will include an Appendix describing changes made to the draft RMP in response to public comments received by DCR. The final draft will be posted on the DCR website before it is discussed at a public meeting hosted by the Stewardship Council.

Question: Where will the Stewardship Council meet when it discusses the Final RMP?

DCR: The Stewardship Council will usually meet at a site near the facility under consideration.

Question: What were the low priority projects?

DCR: Restore vegetation in the White goose nesting area east of the BU Bridge, study the feasibility of using bioremediation organisms to decontaminate bottom sediments in the river, and work with TEA to introduce an Esplanade public arts program.

Comment: Pedestrian bridges should be pedestrian and walker friendly. More work is needed to make all of the pedestrian bridges safer.

Comment: Root damage has made portions of the Paul Dudley White Bike Path too uneven for roller bladers. Uneven pavement needs to be re-paved.

Question: Is the cost to construct the Memorial Drive Phase II project \$6.0 million or \$20 million?

DCR: The designer's cost estimate is \$6.0 million. DCR has already installed new railings along the granite seawall reducing the construction estimate.

Question: Will the proposed Museum of Science Charles River exterior exhibit prevent public access to the upriver side of the Museum of Science?

DCR: No.

Comment: Safe pathways are important. Separate paths are needed for pedestrians and faster moving bikers. More separate, better maintained paths are needed.

Comment: The Esplanade Association (TEA) is raising \$4-5 million to improve the Hatch Shell Area. The Esplanade 2020 Working Group identified \$20 million of improvements needed in the Hatch Shell Area. The Hatch Shell financing gap needs to be resolved with DCR providing funding assistance.

DCR: The draft RMP recommends that "DCR work with TEA to prepare a coordinated public/private action plan to implement the *Esplanade 2020 Vision for the Hatch Shell* area." The action plan would define the scope, estimated cost and potential funding sources for the Hatch Shell area project.

Comment: Restoration of Commissioners Landing should be a top priority. The various Charles River organizations should work together to petition the state to fund renovation of Commissioners Landing.

Question: The river pathways are part of the active transportation network and should be funded as transportation infrastructure. Is a maintenance schedule included for pathways similar to parkways?

DCR: This fiscal year, DCR included a separate bike and multi-use trail construction and reconstruction program in its 5-year capital spending plan.

Comment: An ADA accessible pedestrian bridge is needed to provide access to the Boston Esplanade from the BU Bridge.

DCR: Given the height of the BU Bridge, pedestrian access to the Esplanade is difficult from the BU bridge. The Connectivity Study proposed providing pedestrian and bike access to the Esplanade from the Grand Junction Railroad Bridge, which passes under the BU Bridge at a lower elevation.

Comment: The Arthur Fiedler Footbridge needs help.

Question: Is DCR using the original Phase II plans for Memorial Drive?

DCR: Yes.

Comment: The “urban wilds” on the Cambridge side of the river between the BU Bridge and DeWolfe Boat House needs to be preserved and expanded. Wild areas are needed along the river.

Comment: There have been several pedestrian fatalities along Memorial Drive. DCR needs to install traffic calming devices and new pedestrian crossing signals. Safe pedestrian crossings should be included in the Memorial Drive Phase II project.

Comment: DCR needs to meet current state and federal stormwater standards. Funding should be provided to repair flood damage to the bike paths.

Comment: Happy to see the recommendation to implement the Memorial Drive Phase II project and provide a connection between the Cambridge and Boston Esplanades behind the Museum of Science. I have not seen any damage to the paths caused by river flooding. The RMP should explicitly recognize the important connection that the Stable building site provides between the Lechmere Canal Park and the Cambridge Esplanade.

Question: How will the proposed Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary (MEEI) underground parking garage benefit the park?

Representative Livingstone: The garage will have space on nights, weekends and holidays for park users. A head house is proposed on the Esplanade to provide direct access to the garage. The legislation requires that MEEI pay fair market value to lease the property.

Comment: Steps should be taken to calm traffic on Storrow Drive. I would love to see parallel parking on both sides of Storrow Drive. Traffic would slow down if the Storrow Drive lanes were narrowed. Wider lanes encourage speeding on Storrow Drive.

Question: Providing a walkway behind the Museum of Science connecting the Boston and Cambridge Esplanades is an important connection that should be given high priority. Is it included in the RMP?

DCR: The RMP discusses creation of a connection on the upstream side of the Museum of Science to connect the Boston and Cambridge Esplanades.

Comment: Does the RMP recommend a study of the length of Storrow Drive as it runs through the park including placing both lanes under one bay of the Harvard Bridge? Can we add to the RMP recommendations?

DCR: The RMP does not recommend a study of the entire length of Storrow Drive nor the placement of both sides of Storrow Drive under a single bay of the Harvard Bridge. Additional recommendations may be added to the RMP during the public review process.

Comment: DCR should work closely with both The Esplanade Association and the Charles River Conservancy to improve the Esplanade.

Question: Were proposals made in the Connectivity Study included in the RMP? Has the Connectivity Study been finalized, and approved by DCR and MassDOT.

DCR: Connectivity Study recommendations for the Lower and New Basins were included in the RMP. The Connectivity Study has not been finalized. It is being revised to incorporate the MassDOT decision to install new pedestrian/bike underpasses under bridges included in the Accelerated Bridge Program.

Comment: Both the Charles River Conservancy and Esplanade Association have made substantial contributions to improvements along the river.

Comment: Evidently New Balance will no longer be funding pathway snow and ice removal along the Esplanade. Will DCR revisit its snow plowing and ice removal priorities for the Esplanade pathways?

DCR: We expect to have another year of partnership with New Balance.

Comment: It is not practical to turn Storrow Drive into parkland. This would create a traffic nightmare.